

Constitutional Resolutions Committee

April 18, 2023

Written Testimony, President Christopher Mabe, the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association
House Joint Resolution 1

Good morning, Chair Plummer, Vice Chair Hillyer and Ranking Member Mohamed as well as other esteemed members of the Constitutional Resolutions Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share our written opponent testimony today.

My name is Christopher Mabe, President of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association. I represent approximately 27,000 state and local government employees. Our organization is the largest state employees' union in Ohio, representing a diverse union membership in a range of agencies like the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DR&C), the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), to name just a few. I myself come from the ranks of the ODR&C having been a Correction Officer and Sergeant with the agency for nearly 30 years. I also completed two tours of duty in Desert Storm fighting to defend our democracy and freedoms and against the overreach of government.

My testimony today is in opposition to House Joint Resolution 1, a resolution that increases the threshold for ballot initiatives to 60 percent from the current 50 percent plus one.

There are several reasons this resolution is not a good idea for our members or everyday Ohioans. First, HJR 1/SJR 2 ends majority rule in Ohio by requiring ballot measures pass by a super majority. That means 41 percent of voters, a small amount, can block initiatives that a majority want. That shreds our democracy and takes away the people's right to decide what happens.

Second, it takes away the premise of one person, one vote. HJR 1/SJR 2 is an attack on Ohioans' ability to go straight to the ballot and have a direct say in democracy. It's already extremely difficult to get an amendment or referendum on the ballot. We know because we did it.

Our union members remember well Senate Bill 5, the anti-public sector union bill that would have all but stripped us of our rights to collectively bargain. Organizations like ours led a grassroots effort to get a citizens-led referendum passed to block the bill. But it wasn't easy, by any means. Nor are constitutional amendments easy to get on the ballot. Because of our fight against Senate Bill 5, HJR 1 has hit a nerve with labor, our organization included.

Although the referendum process is unchanged, HJR 1/SJR 2 would still undermine everyday Ohioans' ability to bring citizen-led constitutional amendments to the ballot. It's unfair. It's undemocratic, and it's unnecessary. It makes it harder for all of us to have the freedom to voice our concerns on matters--such as jobs, infrastructure or bond issues---via a citizen ballot initiative.

Plus, it's counterintuitive to think these resolutions will take away the influence of special interests. Rather, the opposite is true. With the threshold raised, only the most monied interests will be able to garner enough support to get amendments passed.

And now, some legislators want to hold an August special election to pass the resolution, just a year after passing a law to prohibit it.

If we are to continue making strides in our attempts to make government work for the people, as our state employee members do, we must not take the bait by focusing on these sorts of divisive issues. With so much work to do for working families in this state, let's set aside these more alienating issues, and work together to make the lives of Ohioans better.

For these reasons and many more I strongly urge you to vote no on House Joint Resolution 1.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide written testimony.